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## Magdalene Lauridsen (1873-1957)

*Danish Pioneer in the Field of Home Economics*

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*Published in:*  
Social Pedagogy Quarterly//Pedagogika Spoeczna

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*Publication date:*  
2020

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Rasmussen, A., & Andreasen, K. E. (2020). Magdalene Lauridsen (1873-1957): Danish Pioneer in the Field of Home Economics. *Social Pedagogy Quarterly//Pedagogika Spoeczna*, 2020(1), 141 – 154.  
<http://pedagogikaspoleczna.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/PS12020141-154.pdf>

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## **Magdalene Lauridsen (1873–1957): Danish pioneer in the field of home economics**

**ABSTRACT:** Magdalene Lauridsen (1873–1957) founded the first Danish school of home economics 1895 and later, in 1903, the first teacher training college of home economics and housekeeping. She initiated the Association of Teachers in Housekeeping and Home Economics, and the Danish Home Economics and Housekeeping Movement. She fought for the educational rights of women from especially rural areas and was very active in representing the women's movement in local politics. In this paper, we ask, what characterised her activities in a wider historical perspective and how did she happen to play this particular role in adult education? We analyse these questions by drawing on Nordic studies of women's role in contemporary society and thus frame it by the history sociology of gender. The empirical material includes both primary and secondary sources to illuminate the life and activities of Magdalene Lauridsen. We conclude the analysis by emphasizing the influences from abroad and from growing up in an active Folk High School environment that made her a pioneer in adult education.

**KEYWORDS:** Home economics, woman pioneer, folk high school movement, education in rural areas, domestication.

### **Introduction**

Magdalene Lauridsen (1873–1957) was one of the most intriguing figures of Scandinavian adult education during the first half of the 20th century. At a time when women's social roles were restricted to caring for the home, to providing for a husband, and to having limited access to education, she was a pioneer in launching itinerant courses and evening classes for farmers' wives and other country homemakers. She pursued a lifelong interest in housekeeping and home economics. As a girl raised in the countryside with deep roots in the Danish folk high school movement, her main target group was women

whose households were located in rural areas and whose living situation differed significantly from that of middle-class women who dwelt in urban areas. She fought to improve the educational conditions of and opportunities for women who lived in farming communities, whose lives differed significantly from those of the urban middle classes.

In 1895, Magdalene Lauridsen founded the first school of home economics and later, in 1903, Denmark's first teacher training college concerned with home economics and housekeeping. She initiated the Association of Teachers in Housekeeping and Home Economics, and later, the Danish home economics and housekeeping movement. Through these initiatives, she actively promoted and represented the women's movement in local politics and fought for the educational rights of women, especially those from the rural areas. What characterised her activities in a wider historical perspective, and how did she come to play this particular role in adult education? These are the key questions we investigate in this paper.

The ideas and educational activities of Magdalene Lauridsen coincided with many other important events of the period. In the first parts of the paper, we trace and analyse events that constitute the historical background concerning her involvement in the home economics movement and the movement's particular position in adult education. This includes demographic and other structural changes within Danish society, educational influences beyond Denmark, and women's position in society in general and in rural areas in particular within this changing landscape. In the second part of the paper, we consider the resources that Magdalene brought into the field of home economics and analyse how history played into the biographical trajectory of Magdalene Lauridsen's life to frame this and her contribution to the field of home economics.

#### Population growth and structural changes

Throughout the Western world, the 19th century was characterised by radical upheaval and changes in social structures and conditions. In Denmark, agriculture heavily dominated the social structure, and until 1900, it was the largest sector of employment: some 50 percent of women were employed in rural undertakings, and for men, the share was slightly less (Danmarks Statistik, 2000, p. 61). Until 1870, agriculture accounted for more than half of Denmark's total commercial production. Around 1900, this share fell to around a third, which, however, was due not to a decrease in agricultural productivity, but rather, to rapidly growing industrial activity. In spite of this, farming continued to dominate the country's economy, with independent farmers assuming a dominant position as the rural upper middle-class cohort (Jespersen, 2011, p. 154).

From the late-19th century onwards, an increase in population propelled Denmark into an era of urbanisation. Socially, large class differences prevailed among three primary groups: the upper classes (the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie), the middle classes (independent business people and farmers), and the lower classes (workers, smallholders, and agricultural labourers). Around the turn of the 20th century, domestic servant work was the largest female occupation, which, however, did not enjoy a particularly high standing (Andersen, 1988). On this basis, the home economics cause became a key issue for the feminist movement of the period.

The Danish Women's Society, established in 1871, was the first feminist organisation in Denmark. Its members argued in favour of home economics not as a natural calling, but as a discipline that should be taught and be on the same footing as all other occupations. The organisation promoted the belief that education was necessary for the occupation to win respect and recognition (Dahlsgaard, 1980, p. 87). It was also a proponent of premarital chastity for both men and women, but as to the question of moral equality between men and women, it represented differing views and experienced a *chastity controversy* (Dahlsgaard, 1980, p. 99). The support given to the chastity issue meant that it lost some members in Copenhagen but on the other hand gained some elsewhere in Denmark.

## **Enlightenment, women's struggles, and women's position in society**

The abolition of absolute monarchy and the introduction of democracy in Denmark with the signing of the constitution on 5 June 1849 is the event that most clearly marks the transition to enlightenment and education for the country's wider population. This change affected not only one's political status, but also a one's place in other areas of society, including women's rights and equality (Skovgaard-Petersen, 1976). In the original constitution of 1849, only a small proportion of the population had won the right to vote or was even eligible, approximately 15 percent, and voting rights were not extended to women at this point. It was not until 1915 that Danish women finally achieved voting rights and were eligible to stand for parliament.

Suffrage struggles were only part of the overall struggle for women's equality that was occurring in Denmark during this period. While the Danish Women's Society participated in such battles, due to its standing in the upper middle classes, it manoeuvred cautiously on issues concerned with the political arena (Dahlsgaard, 1980, p. 126). In accordance with this, it was not as political beings that women argued for the right to involve themselves in so-

ciety's affairs; rather, it was as homemakers (Lützen, 2000, p. 147). An important part of the reform work of middle-class women involved domesticating the public sphere, meaning that not only did they consider society a metaphor for the home, but they also aimed to transform it into a 'home' by turning care-taking tasks handled in the family into public employment. Thus, a woman for whom marriage was not possible could still take on the role as mother and homemaker for others than her own family and thus cultivate domesticity (Lützen, 2000, p. 155).

The calling as mother and homemaker was linked to the Lutheran faith, which constituted a religious pillar of Danish and other Scandinavian societies, with a deep influence on what generally constituted a good and decent life (Linné, 2000, p. 133). This calling, which was also associated with the Victorian concept of the 'angel of the house', attached to women's work in the home a key position in the development of society towards encouraging growth in efficiency, morality, and enlightenment. This activity thus laid the foundation for the home economics movement in Denmark, replacing the concept of the 'angel' with that of the efficient homemaker and set an educational agenda for women (Blom, Sogner & Rosenbeck, 2005, p. 167).

Although the Danish state school system (*folkeskole*) was developed with the 1814 Primary School Act, this system was designed to be only for boys. Women's educational opportunities were very limited in the strongly patriarchal society, wherein education was reserved for a privileged few. Moreover, women had poor access to education and only to the kind of education, which primarily related to traditional female occupational areas such as spinning (from 1750) and needlework (from 1814). Therefore, the Danish Women's Society had as one of its key issues education for women, which in the years 1872 to 1875 led to the founding of a business school for women, a Sunday school for housemaids and working women, and a drawing school for women, today known as Denmark's Design School (Laneth, 2015; Petri & Krage-lund, 1980, p. 107). These school initiatives, however, were concentrated and mainly concerned women in Copenhagen.

### **Educational opportunities in rural areas**

Following a reform period that revolved around new methods of teaching and child-centred education in the 1880s, came an increasing demand for the education of girls (Linné, 2010, p. 142). It was not until 1903, however, that Danish girls gained access to the state school system, including the lower and upper secondary schools, which had previously been restricted to

boys. Access to education, however, remained unevenly distributed throughout the country, a result of both economic and geographic conditions (Olsen, 1986, p. 34).

Of great importance for the general development of society in Denmark, including the education of women was the Danish folk high school movement. In an era influenced by the struggle to introduce democracy, advocates argued for the importance of the general enlightenment of citizens. In particular, the Danish priest, philosopher, and politician N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) strongly advocated for this concept, and as early as the 1830s, had presented his ideas about a folk high school for Danish youth. The fundamental idea was to establish a ‘school for life,’ which meant that the living word should stimulate and enlighten people as opposed to the traditional, elite-oriented grammar school, which Grundtvig called the ‘school for death’ (Jespersen, 2011, p. 114). The movement aimed especially at rural youth, who had always been educationally deprived. It was designed to offer them the chance to stay in a school during winter, where they could be inspired by the living word of teachers and be transformed from inarticulate masses into responsible and articulate citizens in the new and developing democratic society.

Grundtvig’s philosophy influenced and inspired the development of a special educational tradition, known as *Grundtvigianism*. In 1844, it led to the opening of the first folk high school in Rødding, which was followed by several others. Circa 1900, there were no fewer than 75 folk high schools in Denmark. Thus, the tradition of liberal education in Denmark is widely founded on the ideas of Grundtvig. In the beginning, the folk high schools only established classes for men, but from 1861, some schools had established classes for women as well.

### **Growing up with the folk high school movement**

Magdalene Lauridsen was born on 25 April 1873, the first of eight children. Her parents had met each other in connection with a folk high school stay in 1870 and married two years later. Her father was trained in farming, became interested in politics at an early age, and involved himself deeply in the movements of the time, including the Danish folk high school and the cooperative movements (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 31). In fact, both sides of her family were highly engaged by the folk high school movement and its associated thought concerning enlightenment.

She grew up on a farm where daily life of the period involved various household tasks. For instance, the family baked its own bread, brewed beer,

processed flax to produce textiles for both clothes and linen fabric, made candles, and boiled washing. All these activities meant a busy everyday life for all the family members, including the eight children (Nedergaard, 1997). The children attended a typical countryside school, but the adults in the family believed in more progressive and modern ideas of education (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 33). As an alternative, their father established his own school at the farm, where an aunt of Magdalene's, Maren, who had just passed her teacher's examination, was given responsibility for teaching the youngsters. This occurred only a few years after women were awarded the right to teach in public schools (Dahlsgaard, 1980, p. 101).

At the age of 16, Magdalene moved away from home and became a maid in the house of a vicarage. In that environment, she could put to good use the skills she had learnt at home regarding baking, cooking, dairy production, and fruit and vegetable preservation. She met a couple her own age, Eline and Bjerre, who were employed in the same vicarage and who married one another some years later. Her relationship and friendship with the couple would later lead to Magdalene travelling to Sorø (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 3; Nedergaard, 2002, p. 33).

After her first year as a maid in the vicar's house, Magdalene next moved to the farm of her aunt and uncle, where she spent yet another year as a maid. Due to its farming enterprise and the general growth in agricultural efficiency the family became very wealthy, and the uncle later became director of the Danish central bank (Lauridsen 1921, p. 11). The large household of the farm employed many people, and her work there served as an important apprenticeship for Magdalene.

The farm was also nearby a famous school in the Danish folk high school movement of the period, Askov Folk High School, which Magdalene often frequented to attend lectures, and where she also took a weaving course. Later, when she was 20 years old, she went to Sorø Folk High School, where she boarded on the campus, a practice she later instituted at Ankerhus.

At Sorø Folk High School, she became a teacher and taught weaving, but also participated in lectures as a student (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 33). The headmaster at Sorø Folk High School was married to Jutta Bojsen-Møller, who in 1894, was elected as the national chairperson of the Danish Women's Society, and established a branch of the society in Sorø. At one of the group's meetings in Sorø in 1894, the participants argued for establishing home economics schools for maids with a view to strengthening both their professional competency and their identity.

## The first school of home economics

Bojsen-Møller tried in vain to persuade the board of Sorø Folk High School to support establishing a home economics school as a part of the high school. Magdalene in her memoirs describes that such ideas were appearing ‘all over the world’ (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 4). Bojsen-Møller also tried to establish an independent school, but because she was unwilling to give up leadership at Sorø High School, she suggested that Magdalene take on the role ‘probably because she meant that I would be able to raise the necessary amount of money through my relatives’ (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 4). Magdalene agreed to do so in collaboration with Eline, whom she had known from her earlier years as a maid at the vicarage (Andersen, 1988, p. 39). In May 1895, the two of them were ready to launch the first Danish home economics school, which they would locate in Sorø.

Magdalene and Eline applied for state funding for the school and invited a member of the Danish Finance Committee to inspect it, after which they received an annual grant from the Danish national general budget fund (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 7).

There were 25 students enrolled in the first course, which lasted five months, and 27 students enrolled in the next. Magdalene worked with developing the teaching curriculum and the administrative aspects, while Eline was responsible for the teaching itself. In 1896, they established a private limited company with a view to expanding the school, so they could offer places for up to 50 students (Christensen & Lauridsen, 1938, p. 7; Nedergaard, 2002, p. 20). On this occasion, Magdalene needed financial support, which she may have obtained from her father’s brother, who was a successful entrepreneur and businessman, and later head of the Danish National Bank (Nedergaard, 2002, pp. 20 and 32). Some of her letters indicate that her uncle offered her financial assistance on several occasions and stood as a surety of loans (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 20).

In 1897, Magdalene and Eline took occupancy in the new buildings. The school’s subjects included teaching in practical home economics, household chemicals, health, accountancy, weaving, darning, sewing, and lectures on common subjects (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 76). The majority of students were daughters of farmers or workers, a few of them of smallholders, and one came from a market town (*ibid.*, p. 76). In the following years, more home economics schools were established in Denmark.



## Personal encounters of Magdalene Lauridsen

In 1898, Magdalene met with the teacher Peter Dam. He was an influential man who had previously been the headmaster of a folk high school, an editor of a Danish liberal newspaper, and a guest speaker at many political events. In addition, he maintained a great interest in the activities run by the Danish Women's Society (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 125) and thus shared many interests with Magdalene. Although he was already married and had several children, they commenced an intimate relationship that resulted in her becoming pregnant (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 82).

In 1899, the Danish Ministry of Culture awarded Magdalene 300 DKK (40 EUR) for a three-month study trip to England to take courses for young homemakers (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 23). She went there in the beginning of August 1899, and she describes her study visits in the city Reading outside London, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Charlisle, where she stayed for the rest of the trip (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 25). She notes this journey offered her 'very important experiences', and immediately after her return, she started organising evening cooking courses for women. She describes this in a letter dated 16 February 1899:

By the way, I have been so busy after returning. First with daily work and next with an experiment of an evening class for women in cooking, following an English model of course (Lauridsen, 1899, in Nedergaard, 2002, p. 27).

In January 1900, she gave birth to Margaret, the daughter whom Peter had fathered. Margaret was immediately taken into care by another family (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 82; Nedergaard, 2002, p. 22), but after two years, Magdalene's 'circumstances were resolved' so that she herself could care for her daughter. Although having a child outside of marriage was at the time a very serious matter, there was strikingly little fuss about Magdalene's daughter. Biographer Gustav Nedergaard concludes that Magdalene's family initially might not have known about the pregnancy and birth, as she managed to make it appear as if it were an adoption or taking in a foster child, when Margaret was returned to her (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 30). On the other hand, the family relations, with important ties in the ministry, could also have played a part in explaining that this situation did not turn into a problem in her life, as it might have done for many other women at the time.

Approximately 10 years later, when Peter Dam's wife died of tuberculosis, he and Magdalene were married. Their union lasted for seven years, un-

til Peter, who was 20 years older than Magdalene, died of Spanish influenza (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 41).

### **Launching the itinerant courses**

The study trip to England inspired Magdalene with regard to initiating ‘itinerant courses’, a kind of evening classes for young women. Magdalene describes her trip to the UK as the most vital and important event in this respect, noting it was there that she had the ‘opportunity to become acquainted with the Experiments that were conducted to awaken the interest of the House Wives of good Economy and through teaching and demonstrations, give them supervision in certain of such activities and knowledge about intensive use of products at the hand, especially from the vegetable garden’ (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 7). Magdalene also describes that she was very inspired by other study trips, for instance, a trip to Sweden for a teacher course in Gothenburg led by Mrs. Lottan Lagerstedt, ‘one of the Swedish pioneers’, who became a close friend of hers (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 6). She also travelled to Norway, Germany, and Austria (Nedergaard, 2002, p. 37).

A few weeks after the birth of Margaret, Magdalene had started teaching courses at the Sorø School of Home Economics. She created an ‘experiment’ with the participation of local homemakers and a committee who would assess the experiment’s outcome. Over a series of 10 courses, they prepared simple, economical dishes. Magdalene presented the idea to the Danish Women’s Society; its members took great interest in it, but were not the ones who later supported the project – maybe because they had plans for similar courses. Next, she applied for and received funding from the Danish Farmer’s Union (Christensen & Lauridsen, 1938, p. 5; Nedergaard, 2002, p. 36).

Magdalene started the courses in a small village hall, as well as at Sorø Folk High School and at a public primary school (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 4). The courses became so popular that students had to be turned away. Subsequently, more courses were held in other places. Due to the great interest, Magdalene rushed to train female teachers, who could handle the itinerant courses. In 1901, the Danish Farmer’s Union encouraged her to educate additional female itinerant teachers (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 7). Shortly after, she started just such an educational project.

Interest in Magdalene’s activities led to her being invited to speak at the annual meeting of the Federation of the Zealandic Farmer’s Unions’ assembly of delegates. She was the first woman ever to present a speech to that assemblage, as well as being the only woman present at the meeting, which was

held in November 1901 in Copenhagen. Many influential people attended as participants. At that meeting, Magdalene found considerable support for her project, which was praised by several speakers (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 95). The Counsellor of State suggested interest in the courses was so extensive that they should take place not only at the Sorø School of Home Economics, but at other locations as well. From 1900 to 1914, many itinerant courses were thus offered throughout the country, which more than 50,000 participants completed (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 98).

The 1902 establishment of the Ankerhus Teaching School in Home Economics for Women was mainly due to the success of the itinerant courses. The aim of the school was to educate home economics teachers. Magdalene left the Sorø School of Home Economics to go to Ankerhus, but continued maintaining a close relationship with the school and a cooperative relationship with Eline. While running Ankerhus school, Magdalene designed a large garden with both vegetables and flowers, a project with which she was deeply familiar from her own childhood (Lauridsen, 1921, p. 8; Nedergaard, 2002, p. 38). Her 'model garden' involved adding an extension onto the school, which in 1907 was further extended with an even larger building, 'Gaarden', that served as a model school.

### **Advocating for the home economics cause**

For Magdalene Lauridsen, a legitimate course of study in home economics was a way to assure recognition of the occupation of most women at the time. By turning home economics into a school discipline and hiring women to teach it, she meant to provide women with status in a double sense. Describing her belief and the curriculum of home economics more broadly, she stated, 'there was just good sense in that one expected of the maids from the so-called higher layers of society that they should have a certain curriculum and domestic knowledge and practical skill in order to be able to marry' (Lauridsen, 1920, p. 1). Thus, she believed that women in general – not only women from the lower levels of society and from the rural areas – needed both theoretical and practical training in home economics. With the statement, she even expresses this as a prerequisite for women to enter into marriage.

In the beginning, the length of the education to become a home economics teacher was three months. Later, it was extended to 18 months and subsequently became two years. This length of required education meant the students could gain more knowledge about the subject, and the additional length of time ensured that a greater level of status would be attached to the occupation.

Ankerhus rapidly developed into a busy place with many employees and family members of Magdalene and Peter. In addition to Margaret, they also had six children from Peter's previous marriage living with them (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 132), which led to Magdalene becoming known at the school as 'Mother Magda'.

Magdalene had advocated the belief that a woman's work as a homemaker was to carry out activities that would benefit from the homemaker receiving an education in the topic. She expressed her political views concerning home economics as follows: 'Just as important as it is for a country to have capable and good citizens, it is equally important for a society to have good and capable housewives and mothers' (Lauridsen, 1920, p. 1). She widely agreed with the century's domestication zeitgeist (Linné, 2010; Lützen, 2000; Blom et al., 2005), and she herself incorporated public 'mothering'.

Over the years, Magdalene started other activities that in many ways were pioneering regarding the rights of women in rural areas. She advocated for women to have the right to purchase plots of land on the same terms as men, which passed into law in 1909 (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 118). This helped to ensure a livelihood for the poorest women in the country. In 1920, she presented proposals on establishing a ministry of home economics. In 1921, she took part in organising mothers who kept house on farms. She established the Federation of Danish Home Economics Associations, which stood in contrast to the Associations of Danish Housewives for women in the towns. In 1927, she became the Ministry of Education's inspector for youth and evening schools' home economics teaching programs, and in 1938, she became a member of the Ministry of the State of Denmark's Home Economics Commission (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 210).

For several years, Magdalene served as the chair of the local division of the Danish Women's Society in Sorø. Her particular approach, however, of primarily addressing homemakers in the rural areas led to a conflict with the Danish Women's Society and the schools established in Copenhagen (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 108). Magdalene was greatly aware of the differences between rural and urban home economics, and argued in favour of special courses adjusted to rural conditions, because she considered it important to fight for the farming housewives' cause (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 110). The disagreement with the Danish Women's Society had been caused by their critique directed towards her courses for not being sufficiently theoretical. Magdalene interpreted this as an attitude of superiority on their behalf and a disdain for rural conditions, which subsequently resulted in an actual break between the two groups in 1935 (Nedergaard, 1997, p. 205).

Her experiences afforded by her studies abroad as well her as cooperative relationships with women from different lands, especially in Scandinavia, underlined strong international influences. Besides the important journey she took to England, Magdalene describes trips to Sweden, Norway, Austria, and Germany, as well as to other countries, and the 'Nordic meeting for House Economics', the first of which was held in Sorø in 1909, which she organised (Christensen & Lauridsen, 1938, p. 2). In addition to this, the school received several visits by students from the other Nordic countries (Christensen et al., 2002, p. 31).

## Conclusions

In similar ways to the majority of women during the period, Magdalene Lauridsen was taught her field of home economics within the home environment – partly *in the home* of her childhood and youth, and partly through practical experiences as a maid *in other people's homes*. However, she stood out from the majority of women because of her career as a teacher and pioneer in the field. Throughout her long service within the field of home economics, she worked on institutionalising home economics teaching as a theoretical and school-based education.

In addition to being a pioneer in her work, Magdalene broke with cultural conventions by having a relationship with a married man and bearing a child out of wedlock. She ensured recognition of a female-dominated occupation by providing education for women, who would otherwise not have had access to one. She was dedicated to home economics as a professional endeavour, and worked to promote the idea of its status and prestige being assured through education. By positioning herself at the forefront of this discipline, she was an early pioneer in establishing education and training for women in rural areas, which was in itself a significant battle for non-privileged groups in terms of both gender and demographics.

Specific historical events in the form of the folk high school movement and the beginning of women's liberation formed the context for Magdalene Lauridsen's work. The influence from ideas concerning the education of women in the area of home economics abroad, especially in England, influenced her life, revealing how ideas can spread transnationally through journeys, publications, and cooperation across borders. At the same time, her privileged position in the form of financially secure circumstances, along with her coterie of relationships spread out among culturally and socially engaged family members and friends, was important to her life as well. Such frames, as well as be-

ing born into a family in which women assumed leadership roles, formed the backdrop to Magdalene's struggle for women's rights and confirmed her qualifications, allowing her to successfully press forward the cause of home economics and integrate or establish the schools necessary for its teaching.

Magdalene's specific position within the home economics cause consisted of her becoming a spokesperson for women's education in rural areas. Where agricultural schools were established for men, farming demanded a corollary of vocational education for women. It was Magdalene Lauridsen's firm belief that these women needed to learn the basics concerning home economics, nutrition, gardening, and so forth, which they could do at Magdalene's home economics school.

Her radical point of view that women needed to complete a home economics education to be allowed to enter into marriage was formulated during a period when it was almost unheard of for women to not marry. Magdalene's upbringing in the countryside and surrounded by reform pedagogy and the folk high school movement's ideas served to predispose her towards a discipline of home economics in both a practical and theoretical sense.

She sought to establish this respectability via a ministry of home economics, but was unable to achieve it. Instead of a ministry, the Danish Government Home Economics Council was established, which would set requirements for the inspection and sale of foods. She saw a danger in industrialisation tempting women away from the work of the home, which, however, should not prevent them from participating in public life. On the contrary, she thought women had an important role to play within the country's socio-political work, which the education of home economics was meant to assure (Andersen, 1988, p. 45). In this way, she opened new doors to women in rural areas during an era when this group was especially deprived of educational and training opportunities. Her way of practicing feminism by domesticating the public, however, also represented a reactionary way of understanding women's role in society. Even if this can be considered a contradiction there is no doubt that Magdalene's activities played an important role in improving women's possibilities of having an education and a career of their own.

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